

Hugh & Mary - I thought you'd like Betty Eichorn's story -

Margaret Broussard

From: baeichhorn@aol.com
Sent: Friday, June 12, 2015 5:02 PM
To: marbroussard@juno.com
Subject: Your book

Hi, Margaret.

Last week, Hugh and Mary Nicolay took us out to lunch to celebrate Karl's 91st birthday. They gave me a copy of your book *Florida Child*, which I started reading that evening. I have now read it through. I was surprised by the many similarities of our lives and was stunned by your closing paragraphs of the Depression section.

The first thing that surprised me was that I am seven months older than you. I always thought you were younger than you are. My birthday is 1 Sept. 1932. Then you described growing up in Florida. I was born on Long Island and I entered first grade right after I turned five. The following summer we moved to Boynton, Florida, where Mother tried to get me into second grade. As you noted, that was against Florida law, so I repeated first grade. So you one-upped me there.

We had moved into a concrete block building with no interior walls. Mother hung curtains to separate the bedroom from the rest of the room. We had an outhouse too. We lived there one year, then moved into town for a year. The next year, we lived in Delray, then in Miami.

I have identical twin brothers who are twenty months younger than me. We were three of a kind, with me as ringleader. You mentioned climbing trees. We did too. I have fond memories of a large banyan tree in a neighbor's back yard and of an old mulberry tree down at the corner. We could encircle the trees without touching the ground.

We lived in Miami, Coral Gables, Coconut Grove, West Miami, out in the county, and I spent the summer of 1950 on Miami Beach as a caretaker for a one-year-old boy. Then I entered the University of Miami for one semester. I did not go back as Dad said he could not afford it, so I got a job in downtown Miami. I really think that Dad was saving money for the boys' education. After they graduated in 1952, he moved the family to Gainesville. The three of us entered the U of F and we all graduated in 1956, I in January with honors and they in August as engineers.

I had no idea what to major in, but I was interested in everything. I did not want to be a teacher. I fumbled around for a semester, then decided to major in the one subject I found easiest-math. However, what would I do with it? I did not know until I accepted a job on Cape Canaveral, working on the Navajo missile and in particular, its guidance system.

I wasn't there long before I was handed some IBM printouts from the RCA computer. I looked at it in amazement. It was in hexadecimal!. I had to convert to decimal and then process the data. No problem for me; I had studied number theory. When the Navaho program was cancelled, I easily got another job doing the same work. Only, it was octal from then on. I worked on Thor, Titan, and Minuteman missiles through 1970.

It was the fact you were a mathematician, too, that stunned me. I had never met anyone else who majored in math. We must have been oddities at that time.

Our lives were similar in a number of ways, but unlike you, I grew up without knowing my relatives. They were all in NY and it was 1947 before I met any of them.

In the WW II section, I found something interesting. Karl knew who Eddie Allen was. He wrote his memoir of his service in that war, and I am editing it for publication. In it, he described how he made model airplanes and attended the Cleveland air races in the 1930s. He knew of everyone who was a famous aviator. He enlisted in the Army Air Corps in 1943 and became an armorer on B-24s in Italy. He saw his first B-24 at the Wendover base in Utah, a brand new base. His unit was the first one to use it. He noted that the hangar had a strange opening above the hangar doors, and he surmised that it was for the tail of a very large airplane. But he knew of no airplane that had such a tail, until later when the B-29 became famous. When I asked him if he knew of Eddie Allen, he said "Yes, he died in a B-29." Wendover had been designed for the B-29, but because of the accident, B-24s were sent there until a new base was built for them in Nebraska.

I started writing my life story a couple of years ago, but switched to editing Karl's, which he had written in 1983. I hope to get back to mine soon.

Thanks for writing an interesting history. Your family will enjoy it for generations to come.

Betty Eichhorn.

